

# Rebuilding Newry Post IRA Terrorism

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Narration from videos:

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*Like in many other areas of Northern Ireland, peaceful civil rights marches, where both Catholic and Protestants stood side by side, in peaceful protest (as people were doing all over the world), are now just memories for me. In the early 1970's, as a 10 year-old boy, they became a way of life, or at least an expectation of life, in Northern Ireland. However, in Newry, these peaceful marches were hi-jacked by those with a different agenda.*

*From the alleyways within and the hills beyond, the I.R.A.-organized recruits literally pushed civil rights marchers out of their way. A tyranny of civil unrest had commenced and was evident by the overturned vehicles, broken shop windows, hi-jacked cars, etc. All this was done with an agenda to provoke a reaction from policy and security forces that would offer a prelude to a long and more sinister campaign of terror.*

*Within days, children in schools just 50 yards from a police station, were lying on floors as IRA bullets flew over their heads. Children in stores were reaching up to grab I.R.A. guns thinking they were toys. All the while, I.R.A. volunteers sought to finance their organization's future through criminal activity within their own community.*

*One local journalist, an intermediary with the I.R.A. godfathers and acting on behalf of a neighbor, found himself defending his neighbor's 11 year-old son. The I.R.A. was planning to come the next day to Newry to assassinate the boy. His crime? He was guilty of bullying the son of a known I.R.A. member. The bullying took place following the torture and sentencing of his father based on a vindictive allegation.*

*Two lives were saved that day. Both father and son left Newry within 12 hours and can never return.*

*Within weeks, buildings were being bombed, set alight, and burned to the ground. These were excused as economic targets. The fact that they were the livelihood of the local community was not even a consideration. Innocent lives being lost, was almost a matter of fact, but without care.*

*Within months, terror had reigned so much that a self-imposed vow of silence now prevailed. Neighbors were afraid to speak to each other openly about their concerns. In some instances, wives would not even speak to their husbands about it. In many areas, at this time, parents, decent and loving parents, who like us all, only wanted a stable and better future for their children, were confused and oppressed by this wave of terror from within their own community. They could not impart the values of life in any meaningful way to their children that might at least offer hope for the future.*

*The terrorists, the I.R.A., had already achieved their first goal. They instilled fear and all that goes with terror - alarm, anxiety, horror intimidation, panic, shock, dread, dismay, etc., deeply into the minds of the people.*

*In the words regularly used by your President, "Make no mistake about it, that is the first and foremost goal of all terrorists."*

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It is great to be here. I apologize if the imagery of my prologue that I have just shown you and described to you has disturbed any of you in any way. I can certainly understand that, being so close to September 11. However, it helps to weave the tapestry from where P. J. Bradley has left you to where I hope, through speaking of my personal experiences, I can take you.

## THE GOAL OF MODERN DAY TERRORISTS

Be mindful that throughout all that I have to say, I came to believe, from a very early age, and to this day, still do believe, that the first and foremost goal of modern day terrorists, is the evil root that has to be addressed more than any other aspect of any terrorist campaign.

Whatever cloth is used to dress up any terrorist campaign, whether it be religion, nationalism, racism, or freedom fighting, it has one common thread, that being the oppression of people through fear and turmoil. In most cases, you will find that terror is as much within the terrorists own community as outside it.

In fighting terrorism, we must empower the people first affected to rise above the terror and to understand that their terror feeds the very terrorists that they fear.

Easier said than done, I know. Especially since we will always be dealing with people within the terrorist's own community and on a global basis. This is nothing less than we

in Northern Ireland and Newry have had to deal with for over 30 years. The early seventies as we saw earlier, were horrific times in Newry.

I suppose that I was one of the lucky ones in that my parents, being a part of that silent majority for a time, were not prepared to be oppressed and did instill in me, a tolerance for my fellowman and a very clear understanding that diversity does not mean division.

However, when it came to going off to college I was not allowed to follow the route of my older siblings to Belfast universities. Like so many of my peers, I was encouraged to head across the Irish Sea to England.

Well, you must understand that by then, there was not much going for us in Newry anyway. Being close to the Republic of Ireland border, half way between Belfast and Dublin, Newry, for the IRA terrorists, was convenient for bombing, killing, and terrorizing. They would then hop back across to the relatively safe havens of the south.

By the late 1970's, unemployment was at an all time high. Many businesses had been destroyed and those that remained were putting their staff on a three-day week. There was no new investment.

The town had become a no-go area in the minds of many people throughout Ireland, i.e., the young 11 year-old and his dad. Although I am primarily an Irish Nationalist, a Catholic from a predominantly Catholic area, and proud of my Irish culture, the terrorists of the I.R.A. were making very sure that if my peers and I did not agree with their sentiments, we, whom they nevertheless claimed to represent, would not be comfortable nor secure in our own land.

However, unlike the 11 year-old and his dad, there was nothing to stop me from going back. I went back four years later. Never having been totally entrapped by the terror of these evil people, I was totally extracted psychologically, from any confusion that the I.R.A. had anything to offer me or anyone else who understood the true meaning of real freedom and real democracy.

## A VIEW OF NEWRY IN THE EARLY 1980'S – ECONOMICALLY, SOCIALLY, AND POLITICALLY

I returned in the early 1980's, at a time when John Hume, was repeatedly saying that violence does not work, that what was happening was not in the interest of freedom; that it was in fact, an excuse for the murder and mayhem of terrorism. As history still shows, terrorism was fuelled by the brotherhood of terrorism in Libya, Colombia, and such other international locations, and to this very day, still does.

I came back at a time when men like P. J. Bradley were standing shoulder to shoulder with John Hume and extricating their community from the prevailing terror. I came back at a time when younger men like Tom Kelly were coming up behind me, learning the

politics of freedom and democracy from your own institutions here in the United States, and bringing that ethos back onto the streets of Newry.

It was still a time when the armalite and the bomb ruled. Unemployment was still growing and a town like Newry was still perceived as somewhere to avoid economically, socially, and for many, emotionally.

Political stability was so far in the past that people did not know what to strive for in the future. Economic growth was so undermined by daily bombings, shootings, and killings that even British government ministers in charge of that portfolio, would redirect investors, in many instances, before they would even get to Northern Ireland.

Law and order, in many areas, was left to the people as police concentrated on protecting themselves and their police stations. They paid only lip service to the citizens. For each of us here with you today who did not agree with the terrorists, personal security was always a major consideration.

## THE RESURGENCE OF NEWRY

By the mid 1980's, people like P.J. Bradley, Tom Kelly, and many more, came together in Newry. We knew that the mindset of the people had to be changed. The old fears, lack of hope, and absence of progress were things that could be changed and we were determined to do so in the demonstrative cohesion of a wider community.

Unemployment was still a growing factor, but our population was growing, as well. That we could turn this into opportunity was my commercial thought. "Come and see what you have to deal with" was Tom Kelly's response, as he brought a number of "business suits" to houses located on streets where, he pointed out, third generation children were playing and whose parents, and in some cases, grandparents, had never seen a person go out to work.

The response from P.J. Bradley and his political colleagues was that we must help ourselves when in a political vacuum.

Thus, the crusade began. A vigorous and concerted campaign of self-help started from within. The public sector, private sector, and community came together to lift the spirit of the people through tangible projects.

By this time, it was now the later half of the 1980's. Black Friday on the stock markets followed a short-lived boom in the British economy, which was destined for the recession of the late 1980's and early 1990's.

We in Northern Ireland, particularly in places like Newry, did not really have that much further to slip. It was now time for us to play to our strengths. Our very location, half way between Belfast and Dublin and close to the border, made us easy prey for the I.R.A.

It also offered us the opportunity to reach out as a regional hub within one hour of two thirds of the population of the island of Ireland.

Our demographics had changed and could now be illustrated as a young and growing population with future growth and market demand. Our hitherto spiraling unemployment was encouragement to our young people to stay in school longer and learn new skills for a new era.

Our economic diversity with the Republic of Ireland proved that the perception of Newry being a place to avoid could be changed. That could be accomplished by pulling the strings that are closest to peoples' hearts - their money. Therefore, we set out to bring people in for a day or bring them in for a weekend - a shopping and tour weekend.

Shopping! We did not even have a shopping mall and we had just lost our 12th and last hotel through terrorist bombings. However, once again, we had the confidence to dream, the determination to create hope.

I remember our first shopping and tour weekend. It was a joint venture between the local authority and me. There were 37 Dublin visitors coming for a day of shopping in Newry (to take advantage of the economic diversity) and staying overnight in the picturesque villages of Warrenpoint and Rostrevor. On Friday morning, as I set out to meet the hired coach to travel down to Dublin to pick up our guests, the news reader announced that there had been three bombings the night before in Newry, Warrenpoint, and Rostrevor.

The six guests who did travel that weekend from Dublin had a great time and we had determination. Have things changed that much in the last 15 to 20 years?

In February of 2002, I was sitting in a hotel room in Washington, D.C. reflecting on the two days that I had just spent in New York and how the scene and the people there had reminded me so much of Northern Ireland 25 years ago. There was high security presence; quiet streets; and shock, dismay, and horror in the New Yorkers whom I met still shaken by September 11, and understandably so.

### **The terrorists had again achieved their first and foremost goal!**

I was about to accompany John Hume's new successor, Mark Durkan, and David Trimble to Capitol Hill on one of the most exciting trips of my lifetime. At the last moment, I had to tell them to go on without me. I had just gotten a call to say that the I.R.A. had left a suspect vehicle at one of my premises in Northern Ireland — a public place hosting up to 150,000 people a week. As it turned out, the vehicle had just been abandoned post some other activity. It was not a bomb.

As I waited for more news in my hotel room, I took the opportunity to telephone P.J. Bradley to express my sympathy to him on the recent organized attack on his family business. I wondered, in a moment of regressive doubt, whether Tom Kelly had

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considered his personal security sufficiently when he decided a few months ago, to join the new PSNI Board with Sinn Fein, the I.R.A., and Gerry Adams making it quite clear to us all again, that if we did not agree totally with them, we could not expect them to make us feel comfortable nor secure in our own land; just as they had made it quite clear for the young 11 year-old boy 30 years ago.

## **HOPE FOR A BETTER FUTURE**

You might think that things have not changed much. However, as I said, we have determination. Just six months ago, it was announced that four towns in the United Kingdom, one in each of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, would be made a city this year. A total of 37 towns competed. For us, it was at worst, a review of our progress over the past 15 years or so and at best, an opportunity to profile Newry in another positive light.

## **DVD: PRESENTATION OF NEWRY CITY BID**

I am proud to announce that earlier this month, Newry was honored with the title, City by Royal Charter. So our 15 years of regeneration has at last been recognized. I have no doubt that we will continue for the next 15 years with our continued regeneration of our fabric and our minds. Along with that and beyond, we will also be building our new city and that gives hope for a better future.

We have done and will continue doing all this in our small area. We are the living example that it can be done. We are here today, almost half way around the world, to tell you that and to encourage you, America, to help others to do it too.

As P.J. Bradley said in his opening remarks,

*The children of America, of the world, look to the United States of America to defend and protect their futures.*

While the militancy of the terrorist must be suppressed, terrorism will not be beaten by military means alone, because the terrorist never expects to win militarily. It is but one of their tools, their weapons, in the oppression of people's freedom. The United States of America is synonymous with a free world. As you lead the way, there are many of us who will stand shoulder to shoulder with you.

In that pursuit alone – God Bless You America.

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**WILLIAM GERARD O'HARE**

*Born in Newry, Gerard O'Hare is one of Northern Ireland's most successful property and business entrepreneurs with a portfolio of developments across the UK and Ireland.*

*Educated at Trent University in Nottingham as a Surveyor he then joined the growing family construction and development business. Under his guidance, the Carnbane House Group became one of Ireland's leading property, investment, and construction Companies – recently highly ranked Northern Ireland's Top 100 companies.*

*Today he is one of the most successful private sector businessmen with a personal portfolio of properties and investments worth over £150 million.*

*He left his executive position at Carnbane House Group to set up and manage the investment and property business Parker Green. The company created and currently owns the £55 million retail and leisure complex The Quays in Newry. Other major ventures include investment and retail interests in Ireland, Europe, and USA.*

*Gerard O'Hare is a Champion of Public / Private Partnership and Urban Regeneration. He is President of Newry Chamber of Commerce and Trade and a Director of the Newry City Centre Management Partnership.*

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